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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: IRAQ

1. Sri Lankan front-page readers woke up to headlines describing the Iraqi regime's collapse and to photographs of coalition forces and Iraqi civilians enjoying each other's company. English front pages ran headlines such as "Saddam's rule collapses in chaos," "Saddam's rule crumbles," and "U.S. forces welcomed in Baghdad." The vernacular dailies mostly followed suit with "Saddam regime likely to collapse," "Iraqi people warmly greets American forces," and "No news of Saddam." The stories were accompanied by pix of an "Iraqi civilian embracing an American soldier," "Iraqi man put flowers on the head of a U.S. marine," "Iraqis loot the house of a Baath party official," and, of course, the ubiquitous pix of the Saddam statue wrenched from its pedestal in Baghdad." Only one of Sri Lanka's dozen dailies told a different story: DIVAINA (an opposition Sinhala daily) reported "Horrible street fights between two forces even yesterday," while running a pix of three U.S. helicopters surveilling a palatial building in Baghdad.

2. Although editorials continued to focus on other issues, an independent Sinhala daily, LAKBIMA, did comment on the "racket of rebuilding war torn Iraq." Excerpts:

"The U.S.'s attitude toward the UN Security Council is no secret. America won't work very hard to get Security

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Council approval for a scheme to reconstruct Iraq....

"Is a retired American General going to take over in Saddam-less Iraq? They say that he will be entrusted with the oil and responsible for humanitarian aid.... Many diplomats are skeptical ... and Arabs don't like it either. However, America has already appointed him...."

Wills